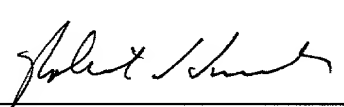


FORM-PTO-1390 (Rev. 12-29-99)		U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE	ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER
TRANSMITTAL LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES DESIGNATED/ELECTED OFFICE (DO/EO/US) CONCERNING A FILING UNDER 35 U.S.C. 371			027650-921
			U.S. APPLICATION NO. (If known, see 37 C.F.R. 1.5) Unassigned 09/806935
INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO. PCT/EP99/07505	INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE 6 October 1999 (06.10.99)	PRIORITY DATE CLAIMED 7 October 1998 (07.10.98)	
TITLE OF INVENTION METHOD OF PRODUCING SEALED PACKAGES CONTAINING POURABLE FOOD PRODUCTS FROM A TUBE OF PACKING MATERIAL, AND PACKING UNIT IMPLEMENTING SUCH A METHOD			
APPLICANT(S) FOR DO/EO/US BENEDETTI, Paolo; SELBERG, Hans			
Applicant herewith submits to the United States Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) the following items and other information:			
1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This is a FIRST submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371. 2. <input type="checkbox"/> This is a SECOND or SUBSEQUENT submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371. 3. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This is an express request to begin national examination procedures (35 U.S.C. 371(f)) at any time rather than delay examination until the expiration of the applicable time limit set in 35 U.S.C. 371(b) and the PCT Articles 22 and 39(1). 4. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A proper Demand for International Preliminary Examination was made by the 19th month from the earliest claimed priority date. 5. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A copy of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2)) a. <input type="checkbox"/> is transmitted herewith (required only if not transmitted by the International Bureau). b. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> has been transmitted by the International Bureau. c. <input type="checkbox"/> is not required, as the application was filed in the United States Receiving Office (RO/US) 6. <input type="checkbox"/> A translation of the International Application into English (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2)). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amendments to the claims of the International Application under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3)) a. <input type="checkbox"/> are transmitted herewith (required only if not transmitted by the International Bureau). b. <input type="checkbox"/> have been transmitted by the International Bureau. c. <input type="checkbox"/> have not been made; however, the time limit for making such amendments has NOT expired. d. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> have not been made and will not be made. 7. <input type="checkbox"/> A translation of the amendments to the claims under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3)). 8. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An oath or declaration of the inventor(s) (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(4)). 9. <input type="checkbox"/> A translation of the annexes to the International Preliminary Examination Report under PCT Article 36 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(5)). Items 11. to 16. below concern other document(s) or information included: 11. <input type="checkbox"/> An Information Disclosure Statement under 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98. 12. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An assignment document for recording. A separate cover sheet in compliance with 37 CFR 3.28 and 3.31 is included. 13. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A FIRST preliminary amendment. <input type="checkbox"/> A SECOND or SUBSEQUENT preliminary amendment. 14. <input type="checkbox"/> A substitute specification. 15. <input type="checkbox"/> A change of power of attorney and/or address letter. 16. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other items or information:			
Publ. Appln. No. WO 00/20279; PCT Forms ISA/210, IPEA/409 and IPEA/401; six (6) sheets of drawings; Bibliographic Data Sheet.			

U.S. APPLICATION NO. (if known, / see 37 C.F.R. 1.50) Unassigned 09 / 806935		INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO. PCT/EP99/07505		ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER 027650-921	
17. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The following fees are submitted:				CALCULATIONS	PTO USE ONLY
Basic National Fee (37 CFR 1.492(a)(1)-(5)): Neither international preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) nor international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2)) paid to USPTO and International Search Report not prepared by the EPO or JPO \$1,000.00 (960) International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) not paid to USPTO but International Search Report prepared by the EPO or JPO \$860.00 (970) International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) not paid to USPTO but international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2)) paid to USPTO \$710.00 (958) International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO (37 CFR 1.482) but all claims did not satisfy provisions of PCT Article 33(1)-(4) \$690.00 (956) International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO (37 CFR 1.482) and all claims satisfied provisions of PCT Article 33(1)-(4) \$100.00 (962)					
ENTER APPROPRIATE BASIC FEE AMOUNT =				\$ 860.00	
Surcharge of \$130.00 (154) for furnishing the oath or declaration later than months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(e)). 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 <input type="checkbox"/>				\$	
Claims	Number Filed	Number Extra	Rate		
Total Claims	14 -20 =		X\$18.00 (966)	\$	
Independent Claims	4 -3 =	1	X\$80.00 (964)	\$ 80.00	
Multiple dependent claim(s) (if applicable)			+ \$270.00 (968)	\$	
TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =				\$ 940.00	
Reduction for 1/2 for filing by small entity, if applicable (see below).				\$	
SUBTOTAL =				\$ 940.00	
Processing fee of \$130.00 (156) for furnishing the English translation later than months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(f)). 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 <input type="checkbox"/>				\$	
TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =				\$ 940.00	
Fee for recording the enclosed assignment (37 CFR 1.21(h)). The assignment must be accompanied by an appropriate cover sheet (37 CFR 3.28, 3.31). \$40.00 (581) per property +				\$ 40.00	
TOTAL FEES ENCLOSED =				\$ 980.00	
				Amount to be: refunded \$	
				charged \$	
<p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Small entity status is hereby claimed.</p> <p>b. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A check in the amount of \$ <u>980.00</u> to cover the above fees is enclosed.</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> Please charge my Deposit Account No. <u>02-4800</u> in the amount of \$ _____ to cover the above fees. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.</p> <p>d. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. <u>02-4800</u>. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.</p> <p>NOTE: Where an appropriate time limit under 37 CFR 1.494 or 1.495 has not been met, a petition to revive (37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b)) must be filed and granted to restore the application to pending status.</p> <p>SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>Robert S. Swecker BURNS, DOANE, SWECKER & MATHIS, L.L.P. P.O. Box 1404 Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1404 (703) 836-6620</p> <p>Date: April 6, 2001</p> </div> <div style="width: 45%; text-align: center;">  _____ SIGNATURE Robert S. Swecker _____ NAME <u>19,885</u> _____ REGISTRATION NUMBER </div> </div>					

09/806935

JC08 Rec'd PCT/PTO 06 APR 2001

Patent

Attorney's Docket No. 027650-921

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Patent Application of)
)
PAOLO BENEDETTI, et al.) Group Art Unit: Unassigned
)
Application No.: Unassigned) Examiner: Unassigned
)
Filed: April 6, 2001)
)
For: METHOD OF PRODUCING SEALED)
PACKAGES CONTAINING POURABLE)
FOOD PRODUCTS FROM A TUBE OF)
PACKING MATERIAL, AND PACKING)
UNIT IMPLEMENTING SUCH A)
METHOD)

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Prior to examination of the above-captioned patent application, it is requested that the following amendments be entered.

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please replace Claims 1-14 as follows.

1. (Amended) A method of producing sealed packages containing pourable food products from a tube of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path and filled continuously with said food product; said method comprising the steps of:

- pressure gripping equally spaced cross sections of said tube by means of at least two pairs of jaws acting cyclically and successively on the tube;

3. (Amended) A method as claimed in Claim 1, for aseptic sealed packages made of heat seal packing material comprising at least one layer of electrically conductive

barrier material; wherein said heat seal step is performed by inducing electric loss current in said packing material of said tube.

4. (Amended) A packing unit for producing sealed packages containing pourable food products from a tube of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path and filled continuously with said food product, said unit comprising a fixed structure; at least two pairs of jaws movable with respect to said structure and acting cyclically and successively on said tube to pressure grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube; and sealing means and cutting means carried by each said pair of jaws to respectively perform, on each said cross section of said tube of packing material gripped between the jaws, a heat seal operation and a cutting operation along a respective parting line;

comprising control means for controlling said jaws, said sealing means and said cutting means to perform, on said tube of packing material, first said cutting operation along said parting line and then said heat seal operation on opposite sides of the parting line.

5. (Amended) A packing unit for producing sealed packages containing pourable food products from a tube of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path and filled continuously with said food product, said unit comprising a fixed structure; at least two pairs of jaws movable with respect to said structure and acting cyclically and successively on said tube to pressure grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube; and

sealing means and cutting means carried by each said pair of jaws to respectively perform, on each said cross section of said tube of packing material gripped between the jaws, a heat seal operation and a cutting operation along a respective parting line; wherein said sealing means comprise heating means in turn comprising, for each pair of said jaws, at least two elongated active surfaces interacting with each said cross section of said tube gripped between the jaws, and located on opposite sides of the respective said parting line.

6. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 4, for aseptic sealed packages made of packing material comprising at least one layer of electrically conductive barrier material; wherein said sealing means comprise electric-current-induction heating means carried by one of said jaws in each pair; contrasting means carried by the other of said jaws in said pair and cooperating with said heating means; and electric current generating means for supplying said heating means.

7. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said layer of electrically conductive material of said packing material is made of aluminium.

8. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said heating means comprise, for each pair of said jaws, at least two elongated active surfaces interacting with each said cross section of said tube gripped between the jaws, and located on opposite sides of the respective said parting line.

9. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 8, wherein said heating means comprise, for each pair of said jaws, four elongated said active surfaces interacting with each said cross section of said tube gripped between the jaws, and located in pairs on opposite sides of the respective said parting line; said active surfaces inducing, on opposite sides of said parting line of each said cross section of said tube of packing material, electric loss currents traveling along substantially symmetrical paths with respect to the parting line.

10. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 8, wherein said heating means comprise, for each said active surface, a projection projecting frontwards from the active surface and extending substantially the whole length of the active surface.

11. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 4, wherein said cutting means comprise at least one cutting element carried by one of said jaws in each pair and movable, with respect to the jaws, crosswise to said tube of packing material; and first actuating means for moving said cutting element between an idle position, and a cutting position in which the cutting element projects frontwards from the respective said jaw.

12. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 4, comprising first and second hook means carried by respective said jaws in each pair; and second actuating means for pressure engaging said first and second hook means in an engaged position corresponding to a closed position of the jaws on said tube of packing material.

14. (Amended) A sealed package containing a pourable food product, produced according to the method defined in Claim 1, and comprising a transverse sealing region; wherein the full height of said transverse sealing region is sealed completely.

REMARKS

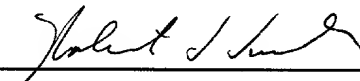
By way of the foregoing amendments to the claims, Claims 1-14 have been amended to delete the multiple dependencies and reference numerals. These changes have been made in accordance with 37 C.F.R. § 1.121 as amended on November 7, 2000. Marked-up versions of Claims 1-14 indicating the changes accompany this Preliminary Amendment.

Early and favorable consideration with respect to this application is respectfully requested.

Should any questions arise in connection with this application, the undersigned respectfully requests that he be contacted at the number indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,

BURNS, DOANE, SWECKER & MATHIS, L.L.P.

By: 
Robert S. Swecker
Registration No. 19,885

P. O. Box 1404
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1404
(703) 836-6620

Date: April 6, 2001

Attachment to Preliminary Amendment dated April 6, 2001**Marked-up Claims 1-14**

1. (Amended) A method of producing sealed packages [(2)] containing pourable food products from a tube [(3)] of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path [(A)] and filled continuously with said food product; said method comprising the steps of:

- pressure gripping equally spaced cross sections of said tube [(3)] by means of at least two pairs of jaws [(8, 9)] acting cyclically and successively on the tube [(3)];
- cutting said tube [(3)], at each of said cross sections, along a respective parting line [(L)]; and then
- heat sealing the packing material of said tube [(3)] on opposite sides of said parting line [(L)].

2. (Amended) A method of producing sealed packages [(2)] containing pourable food products from a tube [(3)] of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path [(A)] and filled continuously with said food product; said method comprising the steps of:

- pressure gripping equally spaced cross sections of said tube [(3)] by means of at least two pairs of jaws [(8, 9)] acting cyclically and successively on the tube [(3)];
- cutting said tube [(3)], at each of said cross sections, along a respective parting line [(L)]; and
- heat sealing the packing material of said tube [(3)] on opposite sides of said parting line [(L)];

Attachment to Preliminary Amendment dated April 6, 2001

Marked-up Claims 1-14

[characterized in that] wherein said heat seal step is performed by inducing, on opposite sides of said parting line [(L)] of said tube [(3)] of packing material, electric loss currents traveling along substantially symmetrical paths with respect to the parting line [(L)].

3. (Amended) A method as claimed in Claim 1 [or 2], for aseptic sealed packages [(2)] made of heat seal packing material comprising at least one layer of electrically conductive barrier material; [characterized in that] wherein said heat seal step is performed by inducing electric loss current in said packing material of said tube [(3)].

4. (Amended) A packing unit [(1)] for producing sealed packages [(2)] containing pourable food products from a tube [(3)] of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path [(A)] and filled continuously with said food product, said unit [(1)] comprising a fixed structure [(4)]; at least two pairs of jaws [(8, 9)] movable with respect to said structure [(4)] and acting cyclically and successively on said tube [(3)] to pressure grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube; and sealing means [(51)] and cutting means [(52)] carried by each said pair of jaws [(8, 9)] to respectively perform, on each said cross section of said tube [(3)] of packing material gripped between the jaws [(8, 9)], a heat seal operation and a cutting operation along a respective parting line [(L)];

[characterized by] comprising control means [(70)] for controlling said jaws [(8, 9)], said sealing means [(51)] and said cutting means [(52)] to perform, on said tube [(3)] of

Attachment to Preliminary Amendment dated April 6, 2001

Marked-up Claims 1-14

packing material, first said cutting operation along said parting line [(L)] and then said heat seal operation on opposite sides of the parting line [(L)].

5. (Amended) A packing unit [(1)] for producing sealed packages [(2)] containing pourable food products from a tube [(3)] of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path [(A)] and filled continuously with said food product, said unit [(1)] comprising a fixed structure [(4)]; at least two pairs of jaws [(8, 9)] movable with respect to said structure [(4)] and acting cyclically and successively on said tube [(3)] to pressure grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube; and sealing means [(51)] and cutting means [(52)] carried by each said pair of jaws [(8, 9)] to respectively perform, on each said cross section of said tube [(3)] of packing material gripped between the jaws [(8, 9)], a heat seal operation and a cutting operation along a respective parting line [(L)]; [characterized in that] wherein said sealing means [(51)] comprise heating means [(53, 75)] in turn comprising, for each pair of said jaws [(8, 9)], at least two elongated active surfaces [(55, 76a, 76b)] interacting with each said cross section of said tube [(3)] gripped between the jaws [(8, 9)], and located on opposite sides of the respective said parting line [(L)].

6. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 4 [or 5], for aseptic sealed packages [(2)] made of packing material comprising at least one layer of electrically conductive barrier material; [characterized in that] wherein said sealing means [(51)] comprise electric-current-

Attachment to Preliminary Amendment dated April 6, 2001

Marked-up Claims 1-14

induction heating means [(53, 75)] carried by one [(8)] of said jaws [(8, 9)] in each pair; contrasting means [(58)] carried by the other [(9)] of said jaws [(8, 9)] in said pair and cooperating with said heating means [(53, 75)]; and electric current generating means [(57)] for supplying said heating means [(53, 75)].

7. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 6, [characterized in that] wherein said layer of electrically conductive material of said packing material is made of aluminium.

8. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 6 [or 7], [characterized in that] wherein said heating means [(53, 75)] comprise, for each pair of said jaws [(8, 9)], at least two elongated active surfaces [(55, 76a, 76b)] interacting with each said cross section of said tube [(3)] gripped between the jaws [(8, 9)], and located on opposite sides of the respective said parting line [(L)].

9. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 8, [characterized in that] wherein said heating means [(75)] comprise, for each pair of said jaws [(8, 9)], four elongated said active surfaces [(76a, 76b)] interacting with each said cross section of said tube [(3)] gripped between the jaws [(8, 9)], and located in pairs on opposite sides of the respective said parting line [(L)]; said active surfaces [(76a, 76b)] inducing, on opposite sides of said parting line [(L)] of each

Attachment to Preliminary Amendment dated April 6, 2001

Marked-up Claims 1-14

said cross section of said tube [(3)] of packing material, electric loss currents traveling along substantially symmetrical paths with respect to the parting line [(L)].

10. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 8 [or 9], [characterized in that] wherein said heating means [(53, 75)] comprise, for each said active surface [(55, 76a, 76b)], a projection [(56, 81)] projecting frontwards from the active surface [(55, 76a, 76b)] and extending substantially the whole length of the active surface.

11. (Amended) A unit as claimed in [any one of Claims] Claim 4 [to 10], [characterized in that] wherein said cutting means [(52)] comprise at least one cutting element [(59)] carried by one [(9)] of said jaws [(8, 9)] in each pair and movable, with respect to the jaws [(8, 9)], crosswise to said tube [(3)] of packing material; and first actuating means [(61)] for moving said cutting element [(59)] between an idle position, and a cutting position in which the cutting element projects frontwards from the respective said jaw [(9)].

12. (Amended) A unit as claimed in [any one of Claims] Claim 4 [to 11], [characterized by] comprising first and second hook means [(13, 14)] carried by respective said jaws [(9, 8)] in each pair; and second actuating means [(15)] for pressure engaging said first and second hook means [(13, 14)] in an engaged position corresponding to a closed position of the jaws [(8, 9)] on said tube [(3)] of packing material.

Attachment to Preliminary Amendment dated April 6, 2001

Marked-up Claims 1-14

13. (Amended) A unit as claimed in Claim 12, [characterized in that] wherein said control means comprise a central control unit [(70)] connected to said first and second actuating means [(61, 15)] and to said electric current generator [(57)].

14. (Amended) A sealed package [(2)] containing a pourable food product, produced according to the method defined in [Claims] Claim 1, [2 or 3,] and comprising a transverse sealing region; [characterized in that] wherein the full height of said transverse sealing region is sealed completely.

b/PRTS

5

METHOD OF PRODUCING SEALED PACKAGES CONTAINING POURABLE
FOOD PRODUCTS FROM A TUBE OF PACKING MATERIAL, AND
PACKING UNIT IMPLEMENTING SUCH A METHOD

10

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a method of producing sealed packages containing pourable food products from a tube of packing material, and a packing
15 unit implementing such a method.

BACKGROUND ART

Many pourable food products, such as fruit juice, pasteurized or UHT (ultra-high-temperature treated) milk, wine, tomato sauce, etc., are sold in packages made of
20 sterilized packing material.

A typical example of such a package is the parallelepiped packing container for liquid or pourable food products known by the name of Tetra Brik Aseptic (registered trademark), which is formed by folding and
25 sealing a strip-rolled packing material. The rolled packing material comprises layers of fibrous material, e.g. paper, covered on both sides with heat seal plastic material, e.g. polyethylene.

For aseptic packing of long-storage products, such as UHT milk, the packing material comprises a layer of barrier material, e.g. an aluminium sheet, which is superimposed on the layer of heat seal plastic material and is in turn covered with another layer of heat seal plastic material forming the inner face of the package actually contacting the food product.

As is known, packages of the above type are produced on fully automatic packing machines, on which a continuous tube is formed from the packing material supplied in strip form. The strip of packing material is sterilized on the packing machine, e.g. by applying a chemical sterilizing agent, such as a hydrogen peroxide solution; following sterilization, the sterilizing agent is removed, e.g. vaporized by heating, from the surfaces of the packing material; and the strip of packing material so sterilized is kept in a closed sterile environment, and is folded and sealed longitudinally to form a tube.

The tube is filled with the sterilized or sterile-processed food product, and is gripped at equally spaced cross sections by two pairs of jaws, which operate cyclically and successively on the tube to heat seal the packing material of the tube and form a continuous strip of pillow packs connected to one another by respective transverse sealing bands.

The pillow packs are separated by cutting the respective sealing bands, and are transferred to a final

folding station where they are folded mechanically into the final parallelepiped shape.

Packing units of the above type are known in which the reciprocating movement of the jaws is controlled by a cam system comprising an electric motor, the output shaft of which is fitted, for each pair of jaws, with two cams with appropriately differing profiles. By means of respective lever mechanisms, the cams control the up and down movement of a supporting slide to which a respective pair of jaws is hinged, and the reciprocating opening and closing movement of the jaws.

Two facing forming tabs are hinged respectively to the jaws in each pair, and are moved between an open position, into which they are pushed by elastic means, and a closed position in which they mate to define a space defining the shape and volume of the package to be formed in between. The forming tabs are closed by cams fixed to the structure of the unit, and which interact with respective rollers carried by the tabs.

The portion of the tube gripped between each pair of jaws is simultaneously heat sealed transversely by induction heating means on the jaws.

More specifically, one of the jaws in each pair comprises a main body made of nonconducting material, and an inductor housed in a front seat on the main body. The inductor is normally supplied by a high-frequency generator, and comprises a bar made of electrically

conducting material and which interacts with the tube material to heat it to the required sealing temperature.

The other jaw in each pair comprises pressure pads made of elastic material and which cooperate with the inductor to heat seal the tube along a respective sealing band.

Once the sealing operation is completed, a knife on one of the jaws in the pair interacting with the tube of packing material is activated to cut the tube along the center of the sealing band and so detach a pillow pack from the bottom end of the tube of packing material. As the bottom end is sealed transversely, the jaws, on reaching the bottom dead center position, can be opened to prevent interfering with the upper portion of the tube. At the same time, the other pair of jaws, operating in exactly the same way, moves down from the top dead center position to repeat the above gripping/forming, sealing and cutting operations.

As stated, the tube of packing material is heat sealed by inducing electric loss current in the aluminium sheet, which current melts the plastic heat seal material locally when the respective pair of jaws grips the tube, so as to seal a cross section of the tube by heat sealing the plastic coating.

From analysis of the packing material during the heat seal operation, the loss current induced in the cross section of the tube of packing material gripped between each pair of jaws has been found to follow a

closed path, which is linear along the two longitudinal sides of the region in which the inductor interacts with the tube, and is roughly semicircular close to the edges of the cross section. That is, the current flows linearly
5 in opposite directions along the two longitudinal sides of the region in which the inductor interacts with the tube, and is deflected towards the center of the cross section gripped between the jaws close to the edges of the cross section ("bending-off effect"), so that the
10 sealing band is narrower at the ends than at the central portion. On the other hand, when packing pourable food products containing small solid particles, such as seeds in tomato products, which may get trapped between the nonsealed portions of the two contacting sheets of
15 packing material, the sealing band should be as wide as possible to reduce the likelihood of channels forming through the sealed portion.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide
20 a method of producing sealed pourable food product packages from a tube of packing material, designed to eliminate the aforementioned drawbacks typically associated with known methods.

According to the present invention, there are
25 provided a method of producing sealed packages containing pourable food products from a tube of heat seal sheet packing material, as claimed in Claim 1; a packing unit implementing such a method and as claimed in Claim 4; and

a sealed package containing a pourable food product, produced using such a method, and as claimed in Claim 14.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A preferred, non-limiting embodiment of the present invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a view in perspective, with parts removed for clarity, of a packing unit for producing aseptic sealed packages containing pourable food products from a tube of packing material and according to the method of the present invention;

Figure 2 shows a side view, with parts removed for clarity, of the Figure 1 unit;

Figure 3 shows a side view of the Figure 2 unit in a different operating configuration;

Figures 4 to 6 show larger-scale side views of two forming assemblies of the Figure 1 unit at various stages in the processing of the tube of packing material:

Figure 7 shows a larger-scale section of an induction heating element of the Figure 4-6 forming assemblies;

Figure 8 shows a larger-scale section of a variation of the Figure 7 induction heating element.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Number 1 in Figures 1 to 3 indicates as a whole a packing unit for producing, from a tube 3 of packing material, aseptic sealed packages 2 (Figures 4 to 6)

containing a pourable food product, such as pasteurized or UHT milk, fruit juice, wine, etc.

The packing material has a multilayer structure (not shown), and comprises a layer of fibrous material, normally paper, covered on both sides with respective layers of heat seal plastic material, e.g. polyethylene. The side of the packing material eventually contacting the food product in package 2 also comprises a layer of electrically conductive barrier material, e.g. aluminium, in turn covered with one or more layers of heat seal plastic material.

Tube 3 is formed in known manner upstream from unit 1 by longitudinally folding and sealing a strip of heat seal strip material, is filled with the sterilized or sterile-processed food product for packaging, and is fed by known devices (not shown) along a vertical path defined by an axis A.

Unit 1 comprises a supporting structure 4 defining a pair of cylindrical vertical guides 5, 5' located symmetrically with respect to the longitudinal vertical mid-plane α of unit 1 through axis A (Figure 1).

With reference to Figures 1 to 6, unit 1 comprises in known manner a pair of forming assemblies 6, 6' movable vertically along respective guides 5, 5' and which interact cyclically and successively with tube 3 of packing material to grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube and perform cutting and heat seal operations on tube 3 as described in detail later on.

As assemblies 6, 6' are known and symmetrical with respect to plane α , only one (assembly 6) will be described, and only as regards the parts pertinent to the present invention. The corresponding parts of assemblies
5 6, 6' are indicated in the drawings using the same numbering system.

Assembly 6 substantially comprises a slide 7 movable along respective guide 5; and a pair of jaws 8, 9 defined, in the example shown, by substantially L-shaped
10 plates, which are hinged at the bottom to slide 7 about respective horizontal axes B, C perpendicular to plane α , and are movable between a closed position (Figures 2, 4, 5) and a fully-open position (Figure 3).

More specifically, each jaw 8, 9 comprises a
15 substantially quadrangular base portion 10 hinged at the bottom end to a bottom portion of slide 7; and an arm 11 for interacting with tube 3, and which is fixed to the top end of portion 10 and projects from portion 10 in a direction perpendicular to plane α . Arms 11 of jaws 8, 9
20 extend towards and beyond plane α on opposite sides of tube 3.

At respective portions 10, jaws 8, 9 comprise respective integral transmission members 12 in the form of sector gears, which mesh with each other so that the
25 rotation of one of jaws 8, 9 about respective axis B, C is transmitted in the opposite direction to the other jaw 9, 8.

Assembly 6 also comprises a first hook element 13 integral with portion 10 of one (9) of the jaws; a second hook element 14 hinged to portion 10 of the other jaw (8) about an axis D parallel to axes B, C; and a hydraulic cylinder 15 for engaging hook elements 13 and 14 tightly in an engaged position corresponding to the closed position of jaws 8, 9 about tube 3.

More specifically, hook elements 13 and 14 are mutually engaged by means of respective teeth 16 and 17. Cylinder 15 comprises a piston 19 extending integrally from hook element 14 at the opposite end to hook element 13, and which slides in sealed manner inside an outer jacket 20 and is normally pushed towards hook element 13 by a spring 21 housed inside jacket 20, so that, when disconnecting hook elements 13 and 14, a minimum clearance is maintained between and to disengage teeth 16 and 17 (Figures 4 and 5 relative to assembly 6'). When oil under pressure is fed into jacket 20 through an inlet in cylinder 15, spring 21 is compressed to engage teeth 16 and 17 tightly (Figures 4 and 5 relative to assembly 6, and Figure 6 relative to assembly 6').

Jaws 8, 9 are therefore movable vertically by slide 7 moving along guide 5, and also perform an opening and closing movement about tube 3 of packing material by rotating about respective hinge axes B, C between the jaws and slide 7. The opening and closing movement is superimposed on the up and down vertical movement of slide 7.

The vertical movement and the opening and closing movement are controlled respectively by a first and second known cam actuating device 25, 26.

With reference to Figures 1 to 3, actuating device 5 25 comprises a cam 27 rotating about a respective axis E parallel to axes B, C, D; a substantially vertical lever 28 hinged at the bottom to a top portion of slide 7; and a substantially horizontal rocker arm lever 29, which is located over cam 27, is hinged at opposite ends to lever 10 28 and to structure 4, and cooperates with the outer profile of cam 27 by means of a respective intermediate idle roller 30.

Rocker arm levers 29 of assemblies 6, 6' are also connected to each other and to structure 4 by a lever 15 mechanism 31, so that rollers 30 of rocker arm levers 29 are kept contacting respective cams 27 at all times. Lever mechanism 31 comprises a pair of substantially vertical rods 32 hinged at the top to respective rocker arm levers 29, and at the bottom to a transverse lever 33 20 in turn hinged centrally to structure 4 about an axis perpendicular to axes A, B, C, D. More specifically, each rod 32 is hinged to respective rocker arm lever 29 in an intermediate position between respective roller 30 and respective lever 28.

25 Actuating device 26 comprises a cam 35 having an axis E and defining, on the outer face, a first and second annular groove 36, 37 having appropriately differing profiles, and which, by means of respective

lever mechanisms 38, 39, respectively control the rotation of jaws 8, 9 about axes B, C and the engagement and release movement of teeth 16 and 17 of hook elements 13 and 14.

5 More specifically, lever mechanism 38 comprises a substantially vertical first rod 40 hinged at the top end to structure 4 and supporting a projecting idle roller 41 engaging in rolling manner groove 36 of cam 35; and a second rod 42 extending parallel to plane α and crosswise to axis A, and hinged at opposite ends to jaw 8
10 about axis D, and to the bottom end of rod 40.

Lever mechanism 39 comprises a substantially vertical first rod 43 hinged at the top end to structure 4 and supporting a projecting idle roller 44 engaging in
15 rolling manner groove 37 of cam 35; and a tubular second rod 45 fitted in axially-sliding manner on rod 42 and hinged at opposite ends, by means of respective connecting rods 46, 47, to the bottom end of rod 43 and to hook element 14, at a point below axis D.

20 Since, as stated previously, the vertical movement of slide 7 and the opening and closing movement of jaws 8, 9 are superimposed, lever 28 moves reciprocatingly, while rods 42 and 45 perform a periodic movement resulting from the combination of the reciprocating
25 movement of lever 28 and a further component of periodic motion for opening and closing jaws 8, 9.

With reference to Figures 2 to 6, assembly 6 also comprises two mutually facing forming tabs 50 hinged to

respective jaws 8, 9 and movable between an open position (Figure 2), into which they are pushed by elastic means (not shown), and a closed position (Figures 4 and 5) in which they mate to define a space defining the shape and volume of the package 2 to be formed in between. Tabs 50 are closed by known cams (not shown) fixed to structure 4 of unit 1, and which interact with respective rollers (not shown) on tabs 50.

With reference to Figures 4 to 7, assembly 6 also comprises a sealing device 51 and a cutting device 52, which, for each cross section of tube 3 of packing material gripped between respective jaws 8 and 9, provide respectively for heat sealing the cross section and cutting along a respective middle parting line L.

With reference to Figures 4 and 7 in particular, device 51 comprises a substantially U-shaped induction heating element 53 housed in a similarly shaped front groove 54 formed in arm 11 of jaw 8.

Heating element 53 has a substantially ring-shaped cross section; an inner cavity for the passage of coolant; and a pair of straight, elongated active surfaces 55, which interact with tube 3 and extend on opposite sides of and parallel to an intermediate plane π perpendicular to axis A and coinciding, in use, with parting line L of the cross section of tube 3 gripped between jaws 8 and 9.

Heating element 53 also comprises a pair of straight longitudinal projections 56 projecting from

respective active surfaces 55 towards jaw 9, extending substantially the whole length of active surfaces 55, and which, during heat sealing, provide for increasing the gripping pressure on tube 3.

5 Heating element 53 is supplied in known manner by an electric current generator 57 shown schematically in Figures 4 to 6.

Device 51 also comprises a pair of pressure pads 58 (Figure 4), which are normally made of elastic material, 10 are fitted to the front of jaw 9, and cooperate with respective active surfaces 55 of heating element 53 to grip and heat seal tube 3 on opposite sides of plane π .

With reference to Figures 4 to 6, device 52 comprises a substantially flat cutting element 59 housed 15 in sliding manner in a front seat 60 on jaw 9 and movable in a direction perpendicular to plane α ; and a hydraulic cylinder 61 for activating cutting element 59 and built into jaw 9.

More specifically, cylinder 61 comprises a piston 20 62 integral with cutting element 59 and movable inside a chamber 63 formed in the body of jaw 9 and communicating on one side with seat 60 and on the opposite side with a pressurized oil inlet. Cutting element 59 is normally maintained in a withdrawn idle position, fully housed 25 inside seat 60 (Figures 5 and 6), by a spring 64 housed inside chamber 63 and interposed between piston 62 and a wall separating chamber 63 from seat 60, and is moved by pressurized oil into a forward cutting position (Figure

4) projecting frontwards from jaw 9 and cooperating with a cavity in jaw 8.

Unit 1 also comprises a central control unit 70 (Figures 4 to 6) connected to generator 57 and to
5 cylinders 15, 61 via the interposition of respective known solenoid valves 71, 72 shown schematically with no indication of the supply, discharge or drive ports.

According to the present invention, central control unit 70 provides, when tube 3 is gripped by each pair of
10 jaws 8, 9, for controlling respective generator 57 and the control cylinder 61 of respective cutting element 59 according to a predetermined program memorized in unit 70 itself, so as to first cut the cross section of tube 3 gripped between jaws 8 and 9 along the parting line L,
15 and then heat seal the packing material of tube 3 on opposite sides of parting line L.

Operation of unit 1, which is partly self-explanatory from the above description, is as follows.

As each assembly 6, 6' travels downwards, jaws 8
20 and 9 of assembly 6, 6' move into the closed position to grip tube 3 with a downward vertical component of motion equal to the traveling speed of tube 3. As they travel downwards, jaws 8 and 9 are kept closed and grip tube 3 tightly by central control unit 70 activating cylinder
25 15, and in particular by the movement of piston 19 engaging teeth 16 and 17 of hook elements 13 and 14 and so gripping jaws 8 and 9.

At this stage, central control unit 70 activates cylinder 61 to move cutting element 59 from the withdrawn to the forward position to cut the cross section of tube 3 of packing material gripped between jaws 8 and 9 along parting line L (Figure 4).

Once cylinder 61 is deactivated, and hence cutting element 59 restored to the withdrawn position by spring 64, central control unit 70 activates generator 57 to supply electric current to heating element 53 and so heat seal tube 3 of packing material on opposite sides of parting line L (Figure 5).

During this stage, heating element 53 melts the plastic heat seal layer of the packing material locally; and the electric current supply to heating element 53 is cut off while maximum pressure is still being exerted by jaws 8 and 9 on tube 3, so that cooling and consequent setting, on which the seal depends, of the plastic layer commence under pressure to ensure perfect sealing of packages 2.

Close to the bottom dead center position, central control unit 70 deactivates cylinder 15 to release hook elements 13 and 14 and so open jaws 8 and 9 - which are opened fully as they travel upwards - and release tube 3 (Figure 6).

The movement of assemblies 6, 6' is obviously offset by half a cycle : assembly 6 with jaws 8, 9 open traveled upwards at the same time assembly 6' with jaws 8, 9 closed travels downwards, so that arms 11 of

assembly 6' pass between arms 11 of assembly 6 with no interference.

Inverting the cutting and heat sealing of tube 3 of packing material as compared with the known methods
5 described previously alters the path of the loss currents induced in the packing material by heating element 53.

That is, as parting line L formed by cutting element 59 in tube 3 of packing material produces an interruption in the electric continuity of the aluminium
10 sheet, the electric loss currents induced in the packing material by the two active surfaces 55 of heating element 53 are confined on opposite sides of parting line L. In other words, the electric loss current induced in the packing material by one of active surfaces 55 of heating
15 element 53 on one side of parting line L tends to move towards the other active surface 55 of heating element 53, but, on account of the interruption produced in the packing material, is forced to close its path on the same side of parting line L.

20 As a result, the sealing area on both sides of parting line L is more or less constant, by eliminating the bending-off effect of the electric loss current close to the edges of the cross section gripped between jaws 8 and 9.

25 The Figure 8 variation relates to an induction heating element 75 similar to heating element 53, but comprising two straight active surfaces 76a, 76b in lieu of each active surface 55.

More specifically, heating element 75 comprises a substantially U-shaped first body 77, which is housed in a similarly shaped front groove 78 formed in arm 11 of jaw 8, has a substantially ring-shaped cross section, and
5 defines, externally, two active surfaces 76a on opposite sides of plane π .

Heating element 75 also comprises a second body 79, which is defined by a straight bar having a U-shaped cross section and housed in an intermediate recess 80 in
10 jaw 8, and defines two active surfaces 76b on opposite sides of mid-plane π and interposed between active surfaces 76a.

Like heating element 53, heating element 75 comprises four straight longitudinal projections 81a, 81b, 81c, 81d projecting towards jaw 9 from respective
15 active surfaces 76a, 76b.

Using heating element 75, the electric loss current induced in the packing material has been found to follow substantially symmetrical closed paths on opposite sides
20 of parting line L. More specifically, on each side of parting line L, the electric loss current travels linearly along each active surface 76a, 76b of heating element 75, with only a minimum amount of deflection close to the edges of the packing material, and which,
25 involving only a very small part of the sealing region, is practically negligible. The method according to the present invention has been found by the Applicant to produce sealed pourable food product packages 2 in which

the full height of the transverse sealing region is completely sealed.

As stated above, in known techniques, two contiguous packages are usually sealed transversely along two parallel lines before being separated along line L.

The Applicant, on the other hand, has found it more advantageous to separate the packages unsealed and simply compressed between the sealing and elastic contrasting elements, which provides for expelling the small amount of product compressed between the two projections, and so bringing the two layers of heat seal material even closer together to improve the seal.

Using heating element 53 with two active surfaces 55, the two edges cut by cutting element 59 but still close together may possibly be traversed by currents in opposite directions, thus resulting in short circuiting - also aided by the presence of the usually conductive product - with the surrounding metal masses, and in less than perfectly reliable operation of the packing unit.

Using heating element 75 with four active surfaces 76a, 76b, on the other hand, the problem is eliminated entirely, by the whole of the central conductor (76b, 79) being at the same potential, and by the cutting element 59 penetrating along a line of symmetry of the currents with no possibility of affecting the amplitude or direction of the currents, thus enabling the product to be expelled and improving both sealing and the reliability of the packing unit itself.

Tests conducted by the Applicant have also shown that using heating element 75 with four active surfaces 76a, 76b and at least two projections 81a, 81b, 81c, 81d provides for greatly reducing product leakage from tube 3 of packing material cut prior to heat sealing. Projections 81, 81b, 81c, 81d may be either continuous or segmented.

Clearly, changes may be made to unit 1 as described herein without, however, departing from the scope of the accompanying Claims.

Though particularly advantageous for sealing packing material by induction of electric current, the method described also applies to other sealing processes.

CLAIMS

1) A method of producing sealed packages (2) containing pourable food products from a tube (3) of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path (A) and filled continuously with said food product; said method comprising the steps of:

- pressure gripping equally spaced cross sections of said tube (3) by means of at least two pairs of jaws (8, 9) acting cyclically and successively on the tube (3);

- cutting said tube (3), at each of said cross sections, along a respective parting line (L); and then

- heat sealing the packing material of said tube (3) on opposite sides of said parting line (L).

2) A method of producing sealed packages (2) containing pourable food products from a tube (3) of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path (A) and filled continuously with said food product; said method comprising the steps of:

- pressure gripping equally spaced cross sections of said tube (3) by means of at least two pairs of jaws (8, 9) acting cyclically and successively on the tube (3);

- cutting said tube (3), at each of said cross sections, along a respective parting line (L); and

- heat sealing the packing material of said tube (3) on opposite sides of said parting line (L);

characterized in that said heat seal step is performed by inducing, on opposite sides of said parting line (L) of said tube (3) of packing material, electric loss currents traveling along substantially symmetrical paths with respect to the parting line (L).

3) A method as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, for aseptic sealed packages (2) made of heat seal packing material comprising at least one layer of electrically conductive barrier material; characterized in that said heat seal step is performed by inducing electric loss current in said packing material of said tube (3).

4) A packing unit (1) for producing sealed packages (2) containing pourable food products from a tube (3) of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path (A) and filled continuously with said food product, said unit (1) comprising a fixed structure (4); at least two pairs of jaws (8, 9) movable with respect to said structure (4) and acting cyclically and successively on said tube (3) to pressure grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube; and sealing means (51) and cutting means (52) carried by each said pair of jaws (8, 9) to respectively perform, on each said cross section of said tube (3) of packing material gripped between the jaws (8, 9), a heat seal operation and a cutting operation along a respective parting line (L);

characterized by comprising control means (70) for controlling said jaws (8, 9), said sealing means (51) and said cutting means (52) to perform, on said tube (3) of

packing material, first said cutting operation along said parting line (L) and then said heat seal operation on opposite sides of the parting line (L).

5) A packing unit (1) for producing sealed packages
5 (2) containing pourable food products from a tube (3) of heat seal sheet packing material fed along a vertical path (A) and filled continuously with said food product, said unit (1) comprising a fixed structure (4); at least two pairs of jaws (8, 9) movable with respect to said
10 structure (4) and acting cyclically and successively on said tube (3) to pressure grip equally spaced cross sections of the tube; and sealing means (51) and cutting means (52) carried by each said pair of jaws (8, 9) to respectively perform, on each said cross section of said
15 tube (3) of packing material gripped between the jaws (8, 9), a heat seal operation and a cutting operation along a respective parting line (L); characterized in that said sealing means (51) comprise heating means (53, 75) in turn comprising, for each pair of said jaws (8, 9), at
20 least two elongated active surfaces (55, 76a, 76b) interacting with each said cross section of said tube (3) gripped between the jaws (8, 9), and located on opposite sides of the respective said parting line (L).

6) A unit as claimed in Claim 4 or 5, for aseptic
25 sealed packages (2) made of packing material comprising at least one layer of electrically conductive barrier material; characterized in that said sealing means (51) comprise electric-current-induction heating means (53,

75) carried by one (8) of said jaws (8, 9) in each pair; contrasting means (58) carried by the other (9) of said jaws (8, 9) in said pair and cooperating with said heating means (53, 75); and electric current generating means (57) for supplying said heating means (53, 75).

7) A unit as claimed in Claim 6, characterized in that said layer of electrically conductive material of said packing material is made of aluminium.

8) A unit as claimed in Claim 6 or 7, characterized in that said heating means (53, 75) comprise, for each pair of said jaws (8, 9), at least two elongated active surfaces (55, 76a, 76b) interacting with each said cross section of said tube (3) gripped between the jaws (8, 9), and located on opposite sides of the respective said parting line (L).

9) A unit as claimed in Claim 8, characterized in that said heating means (75) comprise, for each pair of said jaws (8, 9), four elongated said active surfaces (76a, 76b) interacting with each said cross section of said tube (3) gripped between the jaws (8, 9), and located in pairs on opposite sides of the respective said parting line (L); said active surfaces (76a, 76b) inducing, on opposite sides of said parting line (L) of each said cross section of said tube (3) of packing material, electric loss currents traveling along substantially symmetrical paths with respect to the parting line (L).

10) A unit as claimed in Claim 8 or 9, characterized in that said heating means (53, 75) comprise, for each said active surface (55, 76a, 76b), a projection (56, 81) projecting frontwards from the active
5 surface (55, 76a, 76b) and extending substantially the whole length of the active surface.

11) A unit as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 10, characterized in that said cutting means (52) comprise at least one cutting element (59) carried by one (9) of said
10 jaws (8, 9) in each pair and movable, with respect to the jaws (8, 9), crosswise to said tube (3) of packing material; and first actuating means (61) for moving said cutting element (59) between an idle position, and a cutting position in which the cutting element projects
15 frontwards from the respective said jaw (9).

12) A unit as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 11, characterized by comprising first and second hook means (13, 14) carried by respective said jaws (9, 8) in each pair; and second actuating means (15) for pressure
20 engaging said first and second hook means (13, 14) in an engaged position corresponding to a closed position of the jaws (8, 9) on said tube (3) of packing material.

13) A unit as claimed in Claim 12, characterized in that said control means comprise a central control unit
25 (70) connected to said first and second actuating means (61, 15) and to said electric current generator (57).

14) A sealed package (2) containing a pourable food product, produced according to the method defined in

Claims 1, 2 or 3, and comprising a transverse sealing region; characterized in that the full height of said transverse sealing region is sealed completely.

Fig.1

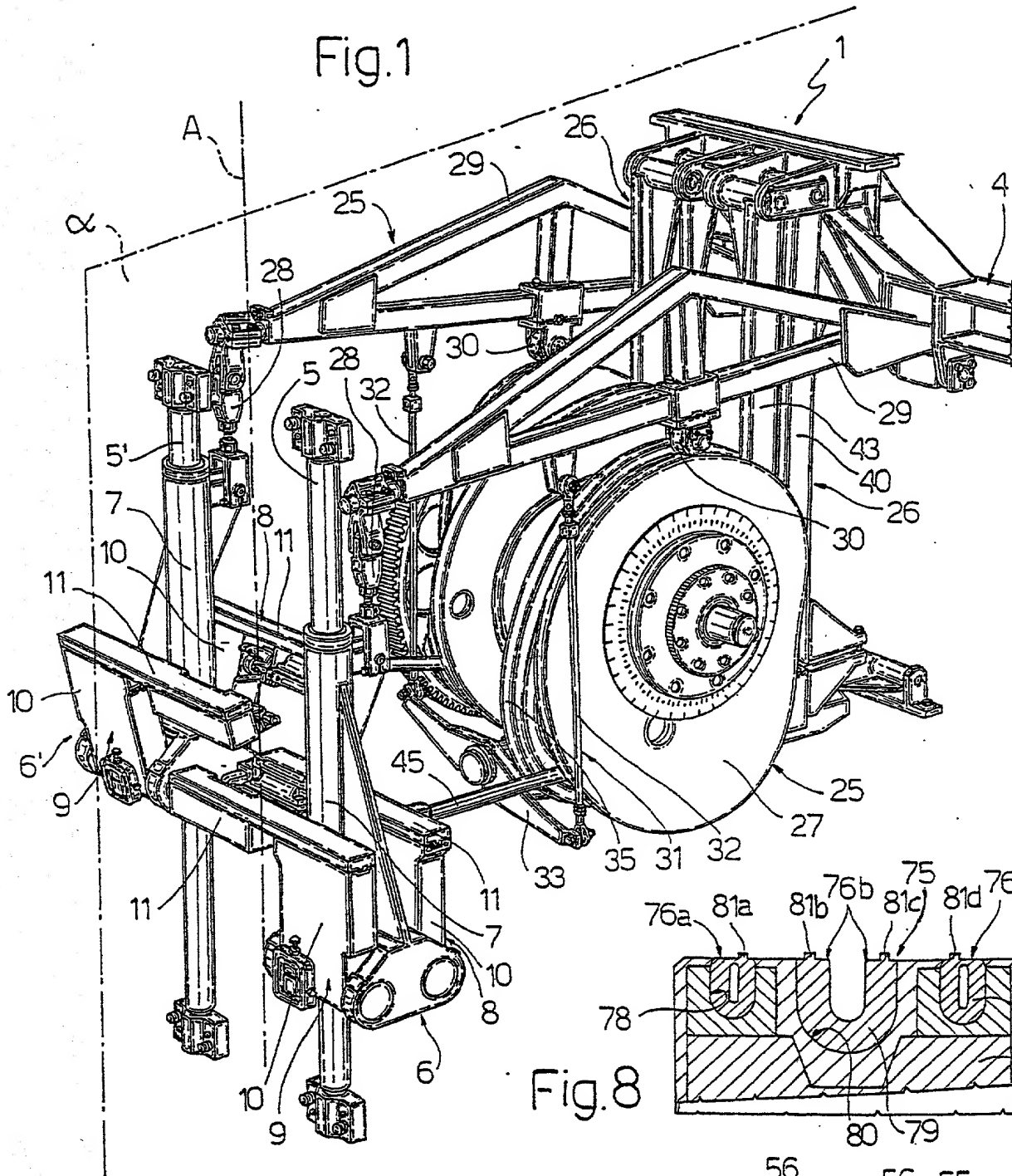


Fig.8

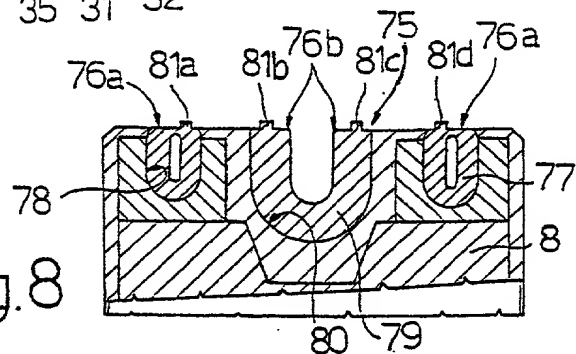
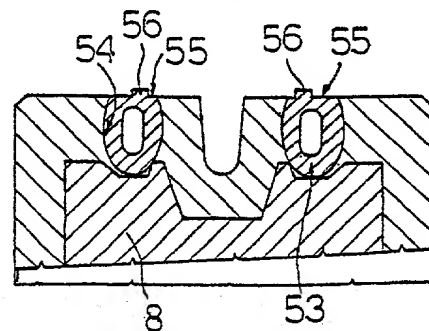
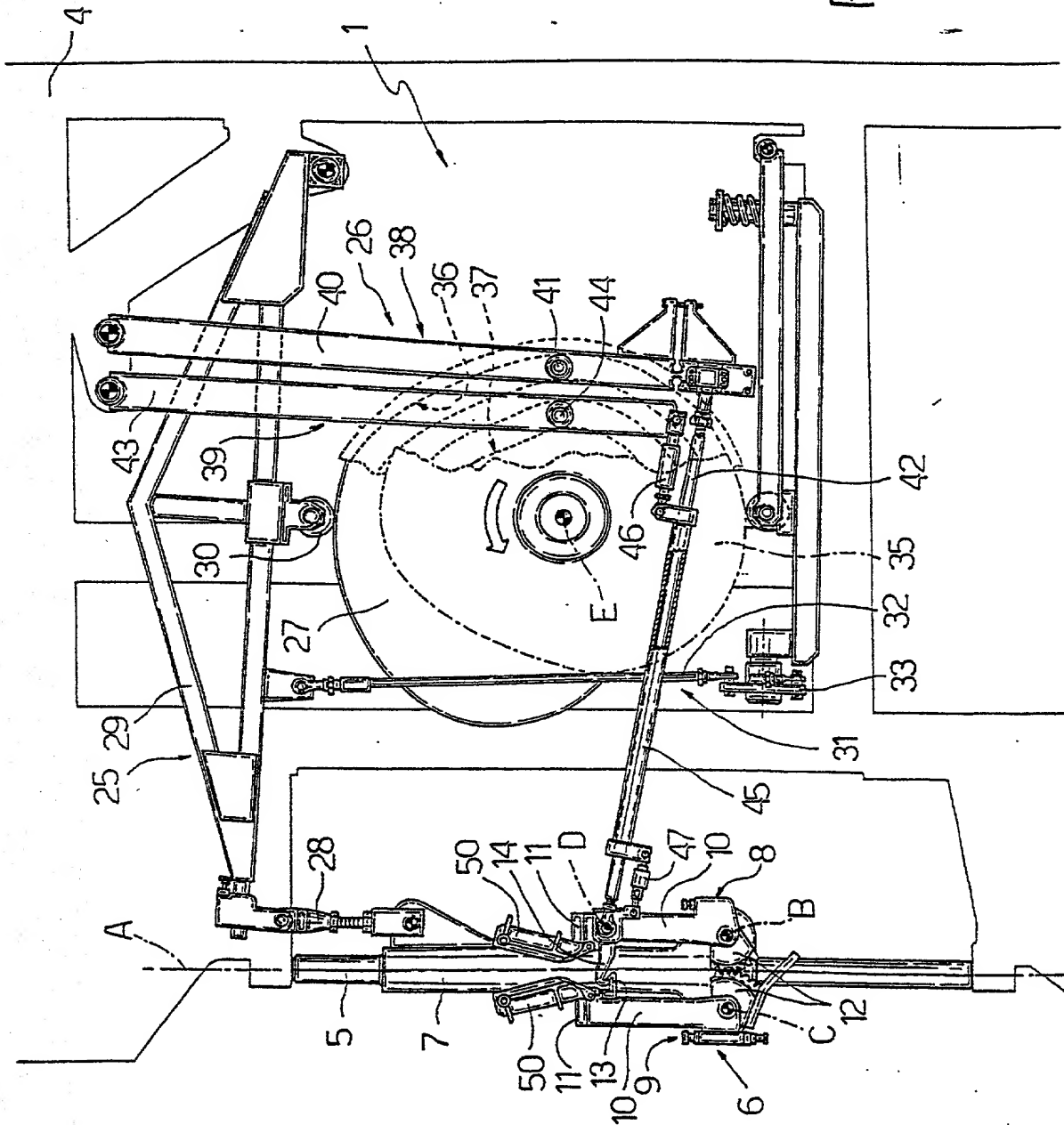


Fig.7



09/806935

Fig. 2



09/806935

Fig. 3

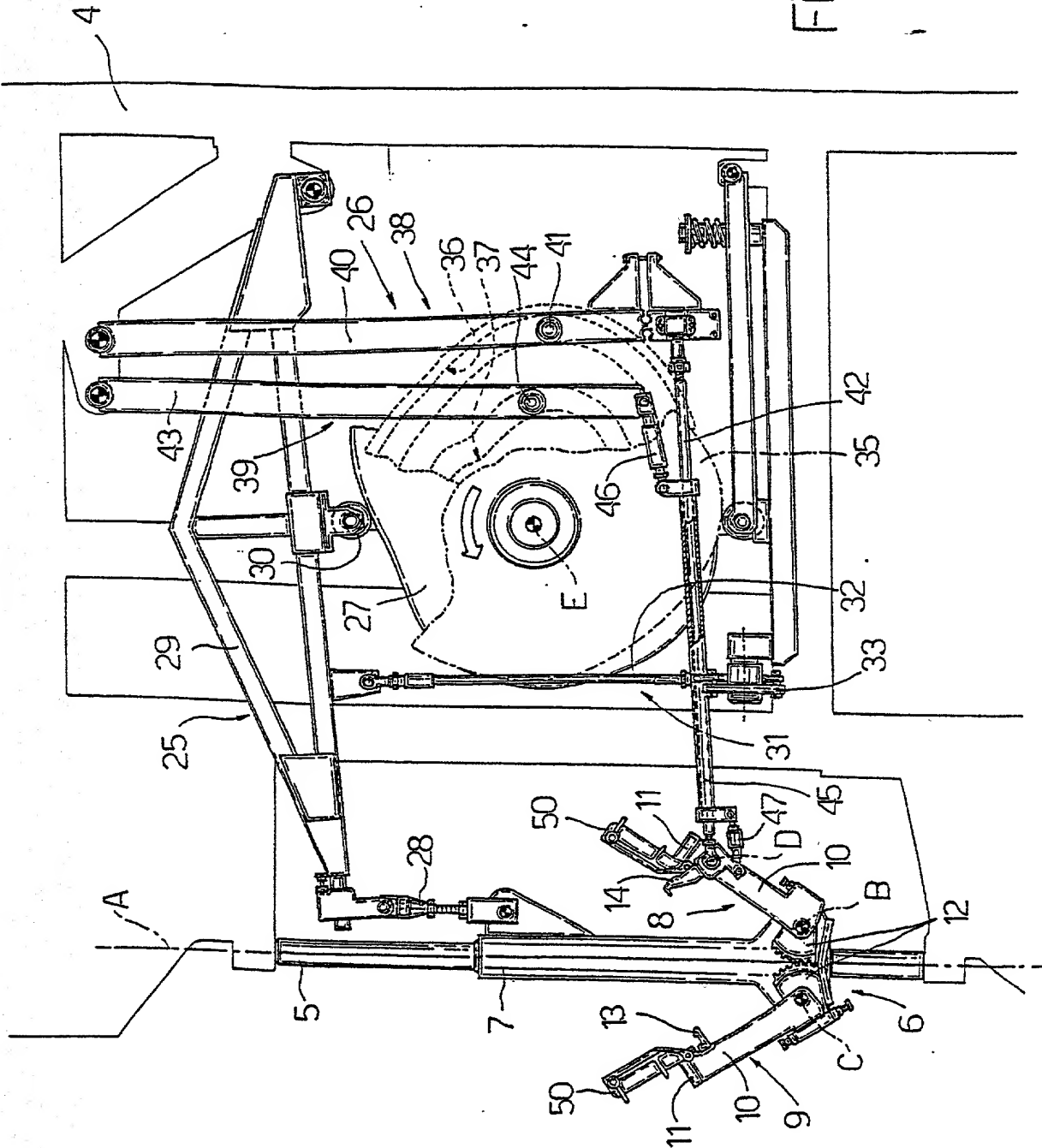


Fig.4 -

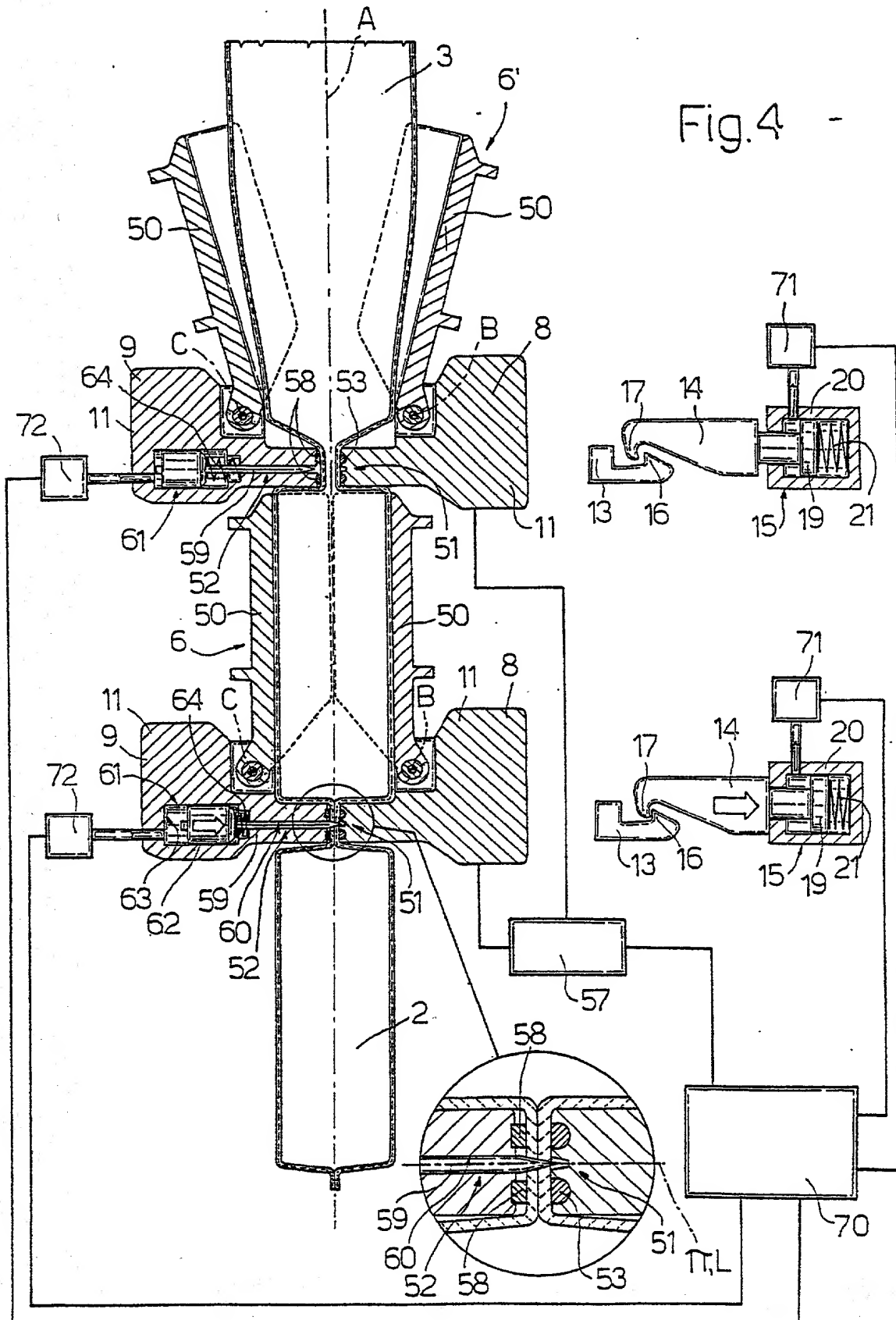


Fig.5

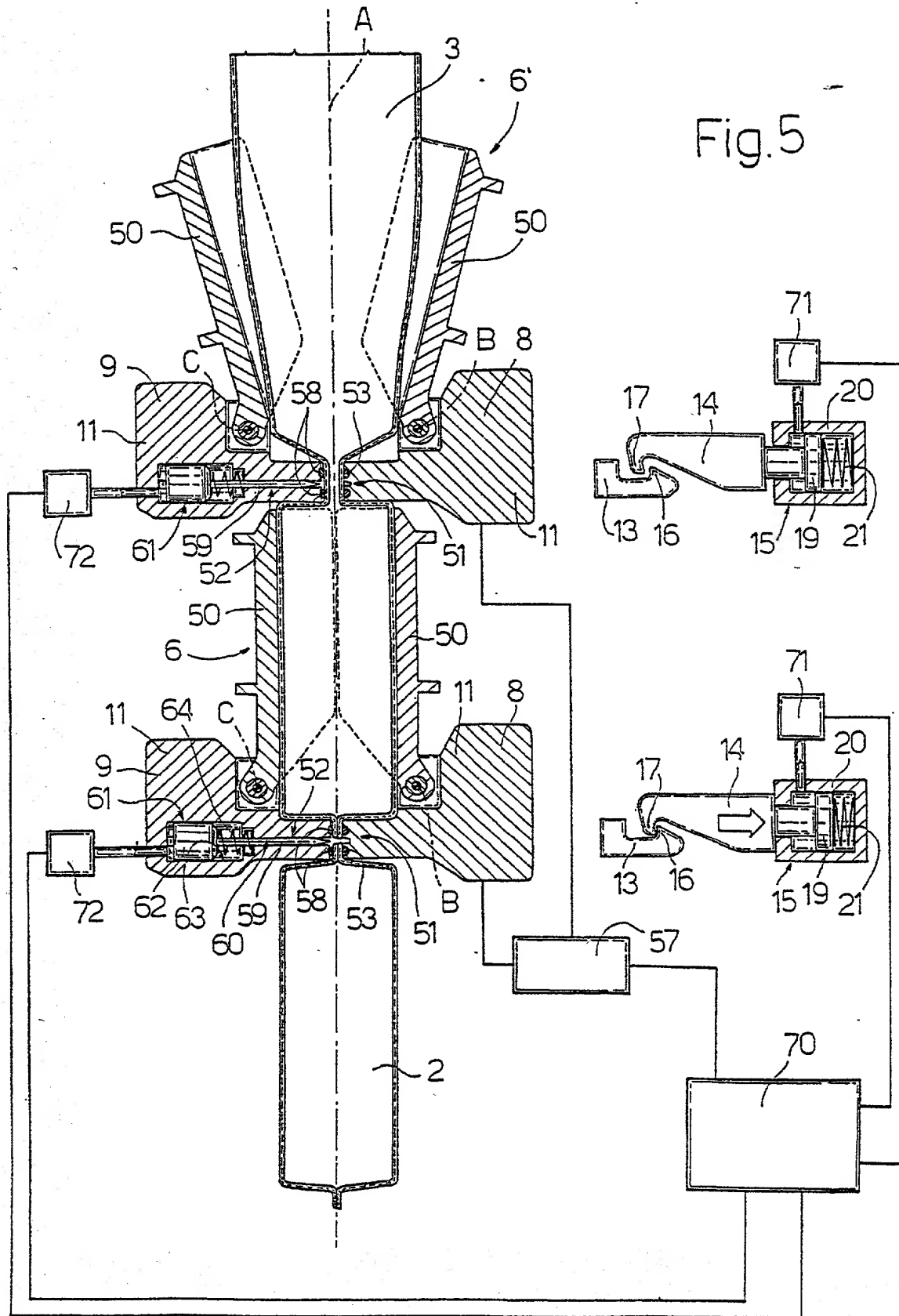
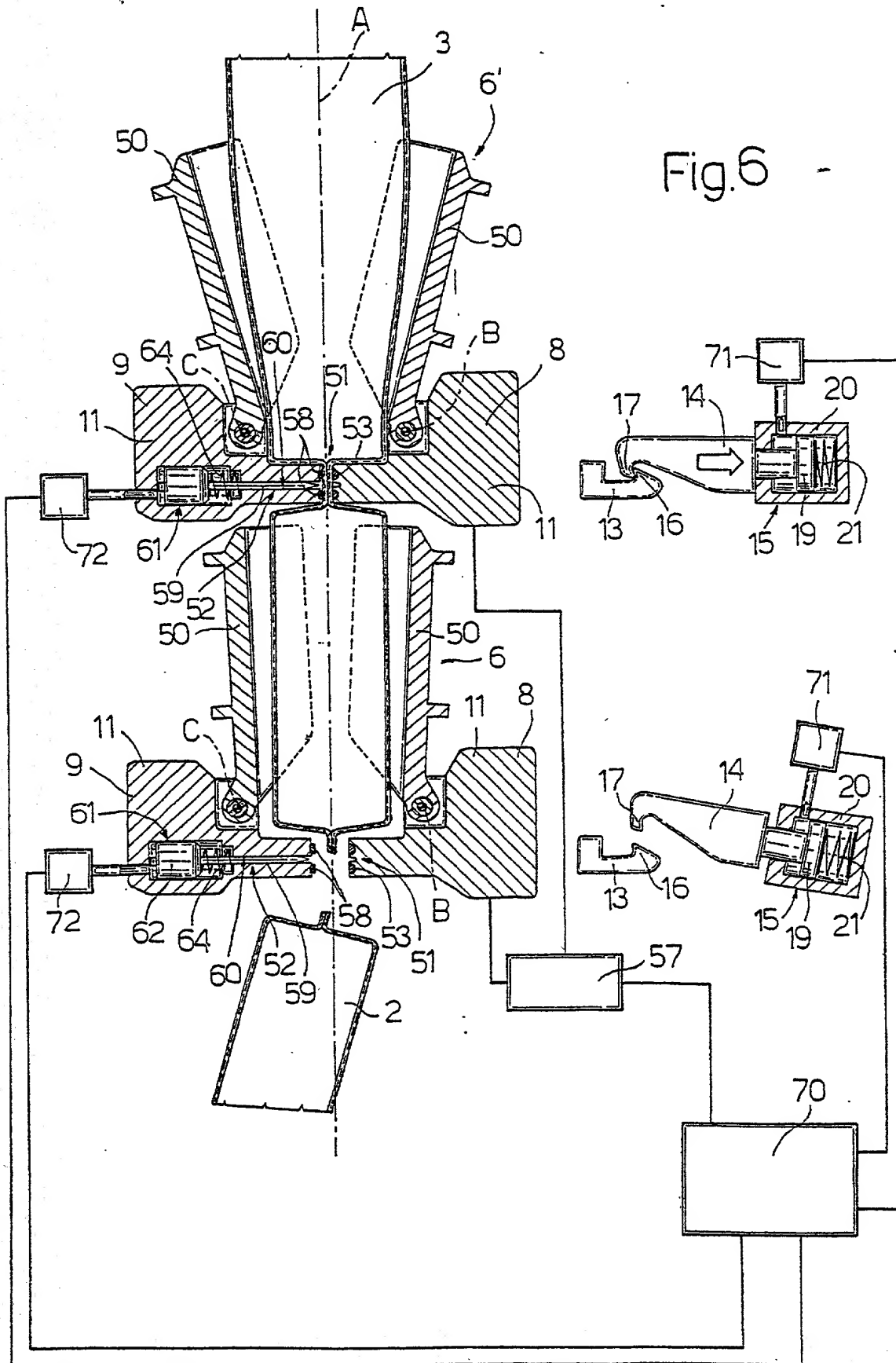


Fig.6



TB042 JS

COMBINED DECLARATION FOR PATENT APPLICATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY
(Includes Reference to Provisional and International (PCT) Applications)

Attorney's Docket No.

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name;

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

METHOD OF PRODUCING SEALED PACKAGES CONTAINING POURABLE FOOD PRODUCTS FROM A TUBE OF
PACKING MATERIAL, AND PACKING UNIT IMPLEMENTING SUCH A METHOD

The specification of which (check only one item below):

☐ is attached hereto.

☐ was filed as United States Patent Application
Number _____
on _____
and was amended on _____

(if applicable).

☒ was filed as International (PCT) Application
Number PCT/EP99/07505
on 6 OCTOBER 1999
and was amended on _____

(if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me to be material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, §§ 119 (a)-(e) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate or of any International (PCT) Application(s) designating at least one country other than the United States of America listed below and have also identified below any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate or any PCT International (PCT) Application(s) designating at least one country other than the United States of America filed by me on the same subject matter having a filing date before that of the application(s) of which priority is claimed:

PRIOR FOREIGN/PCT APPLICATION(S) AND ANY PRIORITY CLAIMS UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 119:

COUNTRY (if PCT, indicate "PCT")	APPLICATION NUMBER	DATE OF FILING (day, month, year)	PRIORITY CLAIMED UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 119
EP	98830588.4	07/10/1998	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code § 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

(APPLICATION NUMBER)

(FILING DATE)

(APPLICATION NUMBER)

(FILING DATE)

COMBINED DECLARATION FOR PATENT APPLICATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
(Includes Reference to Provisional and International (PCT) Applications)

Attorney's Docket
No.

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 120 of any United States application(s) or International (PCT) Application(s) designating the United States of America that is/are listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in that/those prior application(s) in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me to be material to the patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations § 1.56, which became available between the filing date of the prior application(s) and the national or international filing date of this application:

PRIOR U.S. APPLICATIONS OR INTERNATIONAL (PCT) APPLICATIONS DESIGNATING THE U.S. FOR BENEFIT UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 120:

U.S. APPLICATIONS		STATUS (check one)		
U.S. APPLICATION NUMBER	U.S. FILING DATE	PATENTED	PENDING	ABANDONED
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PCT APPLICATIONS DESIGNATING THE U.S.				
PCT APPLICATION NO.	PCT FILING DATE	U.S. APPLICATION NUMBERS ASSIGNED (if any)		
PCT/EP99/07505	6 OCTOBER 1999			

I hereby appoint the following attorneys and agent(s) to prosecute said application and to transact all business in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith and to file, prosecute and to transact all business in connection with international applications directed to said invention:

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I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

COMBINED DECLARATION FOR PATENT APPLICATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
(Includes Reference to Provisional and International (PCT) Applications)

Attorney's Docket No.

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SIGNATURE

DATE

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SIGNATURE

DATE

RESIDENCE (CITY & STATE/COUNTRY)

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RESIDENCE (CITY & STATE/COUNTRY)

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FULL NAME OF TENTH JOINT INVENTOR, IF ANY

SIGNATURE

DATE

RESIDENCE (CITY & STATE/COUNTRY)

CITIZENSHIP

POST OFFICE ADDRESS (HOME ADDRESS)